



Lew Schwartz by Eddie Campbell

Thirty-five years thinking about it Fifty-five minutes on the phone

I recently found myself almost by accident on the phone to an artist whose work I read and loved when I was eleven years old. It happened too quickly for me to ask someone for practical advice on how to tape a telephone interview. In spite of the Campbellian muddle, I hope I have succeeded well enough in extracting sense from the crackle to bring artist, Lew Schwartz, a molecule of the recognition that is overdue to him.

Let me first describe my initial encounter with the work. As a wee laddie in the mid-sixties, I discovered *Batman* at the same time as everybody else, through the TV show. To cash in on the unusual attention suddenly bestowed upon this character, Signet Books had released three compilations of old stories in paperback form in black and white on small pages with one or two panels per page. The TV show was fun but these books were a strange and wonderful transport to a city of the childhood imagination.

As a kid, living on the suburban outskirts of Glasgow, Metropolis never worked for me. The Daily Planet Building was too much out of a retro cityscape like a display at the old

Worlds Fair. If you look at the very first *Superman* story, you can see that Shuster wasn't really interested in the concrete urban jungle. When the hero is jumping up and away among the skyscrapers they hardly seem to be completely there. Joe isn't excited enough to make them real, or to even put windows and other details on them. By the time that Superman's meaning is thoroughly worked out, we have come to see him as the representative of small-town America rather than its big cities. A cover from a 1950 *Superboy* in Les Daniels *DC Comics: Sixty years of the World's Favourite Comic Book Heroes* is apposite. Superboy uses his x-ray vision to see the apple pie in the oven. "Oh dear," says old white-haired Martha Kent, "I can't keep any surprises from you, son". Batman's environment on the other hand was pure big city: a place of dark alleys where your parents might get mugged; of yelling corner newsvendors; and hoodlums in zoot-suits whose thoughts we can never know; of perfectly dressed women with exotic scents haunting their slipstream. Everything here is impossibly huge and seen from low points of view; and exotic, like parade float displays. And on the outskirts of town where long shadows reach, there are factories with open vats full of bubbling unspeakable chemicals.

Left: A lively splash page from Batman #57 February/March 1950, pencilled by Lew Schwartz, probably inked by Charles Paris.

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CHLOÉ



Jules Lefebvre

Jack, my father-in-law was visiting when he fixed his eyes upon the full-length nude we'd just hung facing the dining table. 'My goodness, it's *Chloé!*' he exclaimed. This was a considerable relief as we had expected dinner to be overcast by disapproval. He proceeded to describe the symbolic value that *Chloé* represented, and still does, to a couple of

generations of Australian men, among whose number he is included, shipped out to two World Wars. I decided to research the story.

I've viewed two paintings in the original by Jules Lefebvre. One hangs in the Musée d'Orsay in Paris, the other in a bar in Australia. Lefebvre is an artist largely ignored by 20th century scholarship but you may find his reputation preserved by such organisations as The American Society of Classical Realism. In fact, as a noted teacher at the Academie Julian in late 19th century Paris, many of his pupils were Americans who went on to find recognition: Thomas Wilmer Dewing, John Henry Twachtman, Childe Hassam, Willard Metcalf, Frank W. Benson, Edmund C. Tarbell, George Hitchcock *et cetera*. One can draw a fairly unbroken line from French academic painting through the great American illustrators. For instance, J.C. Leyendecker studied under John H. Vanderpoel, 'a renowned anatomist who had been a pupil of Boulanger and Lefebvre at the Academie Julian', and Leyendecker in turn became a mentor to Norman Rockwell.

I originally wrote a couple of paragraphs here mocking the folly of the both the Classical Realist and the Fine Art writers with their ranting factionalism. On the one side 'a pile of worthless artists who chose brushless glossy mechanical truth to appearances over personal facture and significant form' and on the other 'the emperor's new clothes', but let's not draw any more attention to them.

When I said I'd viewed two of the paintings, I fibbed. In Paris recently to promote *From Hell*, I set aside some time to find Lefebvre on his home turf but was foiled at every turn. In the bookshop of the Louvre I ascertained that Lefebvre's *Verité* hangs in the Musée d'Orsay but I was off to a bad start when both galleries went on strike the following day. Apparently they resented being required to work more than 35 hours per week. I was astonished to find that such short working weeks still exist. It was Saturday before I could get back on the trail. For some annoying reason the canvas wasn't on show and once again the bookshop provided the next clue. It's not easy to find anything about Lefebvre in standard art books, but a huge two-volume work: *Arts of the Nineteenth Century* by Francois Cachin (Abrams 1999) gave two short references. 'A painter with a far more academic technique was Jules Lefebvre (1836-1911) who was awarded the *prix de Rome* in 1861 and lost no time in climbing the ladder of an official career. Lefebvre also had a solid private clientele and was able to behave in a haughty, not to say scornful, manner toward the state authorities, who had to pay a large sum of money at the 1870 Salon for his *Truth (Verité)* which was actually no more than a version of *Spring (La Source, 1956)* by Ingres. Beneath his genuinely assured craftsmanship, Lefebvre's over-scrupulous fidelity to realistic portrayal of his studio model (notably her face) led to a sort of vulgarity that was in fact very typical. This sort of art had gradually lost its substance since the heroic days of Davidian neoclassicism.' I'm not sure what he means by 'vulgarity' unless he's referring to that effect you find in Roman portrait statues where a realistic head was placed on a copy of the classical Greek body of a deity. Given *Chloé's* popular history, which I'm presuming has flown completely outside the radar of European Art writers, I suppose we should probably accept the accuracy of his intuition.

A French encyclopedia entry gives me a short list of works: *Nymph et Bacchus* 1866, (Trouville theatre municipal), *La Verité* 1870, decorations de L'hôtel de Ville de Paris (*L'Inspiration, La Meditation, Salon de lettres*), *Graziella* 1878 (Metropolitan Museum), *Lady Godiva* 1890 (Musée d'Amiens), *Grizeldis* 1896 (Musée de Rouen). The only one in Paris is the Hôtel de Ville. I had hoofed it down there before it occurred to me



HE TOOK ME TO THE MOVIES!

At the premiere of FROM HELL in Los Angeles with Hayley Campbell.

Shopping with Pam Noles

Days before we left for LA, I had dragged my poor friend Moff through all the shops in Brisbane in the hope that I would find something to wear to the premiere. She would pick up something and in exasperation flop on the floor and say “JUST TRY IT ON! JUST TRY IT OOOOOOON!” Of course, we didn’t find anything. Nothing is that simple. So after several

panicky pleading emails to Pam Noles, a friend of Dad’s, a shopping trip in LA was arranged.

Our mission for the day was to find something suitable to impress the likes of Johnny Depp. Pam hurtled through the LA traffic squealing with joy because “WE GET TO USE THE CARPOOL LANE!” while I gripped the dashboard in terror. When she wasn’t hurling abuse at other cars, she would